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Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development

Written statement* submitted by Presse Embleme Campagne, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[26 May 2014]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

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Please

Journalists need protection in order to ensure their safety

Focus on the subject

As of the day of submission of this written contribution (25 May 2014), 44 journalists and media workers have been killed around the world in 2014. The deadliest countries being Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic with 5 victims each followed by the Central African Republic, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Brazil with 4 victims each and Ukraine with 3 victims. An undefined number (between 30 and 50) are detained or held incommunicado either by governmental forces or non-State actors, mainly in the Middle-East region.

In order to apprehend correctly the problems faced by journalists and media workers and thus better identify challenges and good practices it has to be kept in mind that the great majority of the media workers are killed in conflict situations, violent civil unrest or in countries where the State authorities have to face political or criminal armed movements: all kind of situations where the State cannot develop policies and practices in a regular way; on the contrary, authorities are militarily engaged in a confrontational struggle against a more or less large part of the population.

This is evident when one looks at the recent year's statistics[1] of killed journalists and media workers. In 2013, out of the 129 victims, 17 were killed in the Syrian Arab Republic, 16 in Iraq, 14 in Pakistan, 11 in the Philippines, 8 in Somalia, 7 in Egypt, 6 in Brazil, 5 in Mexico, 3 in Afghanistan, Colombia and Libya. In 2012, out of the 141 victims, 37 were killed in the Syrian Arab Republic, 19 in Somalia, 12 in Pakistan, 11 in Brazil and Mexico, 6 in the Philippines, 3 in Gaza/Israel, Nigeria, Eritrea and Iraq, 2 in Afghanistan and Colombia. In 2011, out of the 107 victims, 12 were killed in Mexico, 11 in Pakistan, 7 in Iraq and Libya, 6 in the Philippines and Brazil, 5 in Yemen, 4 in Somalia, 3 in Afghanistan, Egypt, India, Peru and in the Russian Federation, 2 in Syria and 1 in Colombia, Gaza (OPT). In 2010, out of the 110 victims, 14 were killed in Mexico and Pakistan, 10 in Honduras, 8 in Iraq, 6 in the Philippines, 5 in Nigeria and in the Russian Federation, 4 in Brazil, 3 in Somalia and Nepal and 2 in Afghanistan.

In these circumstances, there is no doubt that impunity is the fuel of the more than thousand journalists and media workers killed in the last 10 years, whether the responsible of the crimes belong to the State authorities or to a political or criminal armed group.

Due to the role journalists play in informing the public and in contributing to transparency and accountability in the conduct of public affairs, it is essential for the international community to have as many of them as possible on the ground to report and analyse specific situations so that the plurality of the reports can insure a broader image of the reality and a better understanding of the challenges of a crisis. Governments have to accept the idea that journalists are influenced by their education, cultural and philosophical background and opinions as well as by their respective editorial instructions.

The limitations of existing international instruments

The reports presented to the twentieth session of the Human Rights Council by the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression[2] and the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions[3], as well as the report of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on good practices concerning the safety of journalists[4] clearly demonstrate that none of the existing mechanisms, at the national, regional or international level, is instrumental in combating impunity, notably against the crimes committed in conflict situations.

While all those norms, rules, policies and practices can be effectively instrumental in reinforcing freedom of opinion and expression, including freedom of the press, in a peaceful world, they suddenly become powerless when a situation of tension and armed confrontation arises in a country.

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[1] Press Emblem Campaign statistics are available at http://www.pressemblem.ch/5037.html
[2] A/HRC720/17
[3] A/HRC/20/22
[4] A/HRC/24/23

The International Humanitarian Law, even though it offers protection to journalists and media workers as civilian (in other terms as human beings not participating to the conflict) it does not provide them with a real protection for the duty they are carrying out. In reality, journalists and media workers have no protection at all since their specific role is not formally recognized.

There is an urgent need for the international community to adopt a more comprehensive approach of a global protection of journalists and media workers which could concretely combat the plague of impunity with independent special mechanisms for investigation and prosecution.

Conclusion

In his report[5] to the Human Rights Council, the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions invited States and relevant United Nations bodies and agencies, in consultation with all relevant stakeholders, to explore the need for a specific United Nations instrument.

The Press Emblem Campaign considers that the time has come for the international community to take further steps in order to strengthen the protection of journalists and media workers and invites the Human Rights Council to request a study to its Advisory Committee.

[5] A/HRC/20/22 par. 124